

NORTHEAST MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLNESS CENTER WALKS TO OVERCOME INTERNALIZED STIGMA

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On Saturday, October 6, 2012, Northeast Mental Health and Wellness Center clients, volunteers and staff came together to walk for the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Annual Walk. The 35 participants included nine staff and 26 clients and family members.

Northeast Wellness Center is a proud sponsor of NAMI and works alongside with this nationally recognized organization to further raise awareness of its worthy and much-needed causes. This is another way Northeast Wellness Center works toward engaging clients to participate and be part of their community.

The NAMI philosophy of reducing stigma matches the Northeast Wellness Center's mission which is to assist clients realize their skills, gifts and talents, and to support their brilliance as they find their place in the world.

Dina Flores, Mental Health Peer Advocate, led the effort along with the "Positive Visions Client Council" fundraising committee, and a group of dedicated volunteers who raised \$767.00. They hosted car washes, sold tamales and raffled gift baskets. These fundraising activities also serve to enhance clients' vocational skills, self-esteem and a sense of belonging, together fighting the social stigma. This success proves that the "Positive Visions Client Council" has groomed effective leadership through peer coordination of significant community events such as the NAMI Walk.



When people are diagnosed with a brain disorder, often the internalized stigma creates even more distress than the actual diagnosis. So, these Northeast Wellness Center fundraising activities promoted by peer driven groups serve to engage peers, build self-confidence in each other, and realize life-altering opportunities through community leadership.

Clients were energized by the walk! They came back with an increased sense of optimism and hope and with a deeper realization that they are not alone in their journey of recovery because they were exposed to thousands of other people who are dealing with mental health issues. The following are testimonies that some of the clients shared with staff upon their return:

- “Let’s do more fundraising events, so that we can raise more money for this worthy cause next year.”
- “I am surprised of how many people were at the walk supporting NAMI, and I would like to do this in my native country of Nicaragua.”
- “I am very happy and feel very supported by the Northeast Wellness Center staff because they are walking alongside us.”
- “I am very proud to be a participant of this special event because it fights stigma.”
- “I am appreciative to see the unity and the support from the community, other peers and the mental health employees.”

We thank the “Positive Visions Client Council” fundraising committee, led by Jackie Chavez, who had the fiscal and project implementation responsibilities for all fundraising to remain a client-centered activity. Thank you to Dina Flores, and all the staff, clients, and volunteers for their dedication and hard work.

